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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 431st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 11 July 1994, at 10:30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The CHAIRMAN declared the session open. He recalled that the provisional agenda of the Ad Hoc Committee had been prepared on the basis of the mandate conferred on the Committee by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/82, of 16 December 1993. The General Assembly had requested the Committee to continue consideration of new alternative approaches towards attainment of the objectives of the 1971 Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace on the basis of its 1993 conclusions and recommendations (A/48/29, chap. III). At its 1993 session, which had represented a watershed in its debates, the Committee, leaving behind the sterile rhetoric of the past, had adopted a forward-looking approach characterized by pragmatism and aimed at identifying points of agreement and divergence in terms of means of attaining the objectives of peace, security and stability in the region. The Committee must now take a further step forward so as to embark upon a new period of cooperation based on recognition of the importance of the 1971 Declaration, the complementarity of global and regional efforts, the importance of regional States' making their own contribution to the process, and changing realities in terms of the presence in the region of foreign military Powers. Further, in view of the impending entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the positive developments in South Africa, it was all the more important for the members of the international community that were interested in the stability of the region to join the Committee in its endeavours.

2. He invited delegations to build their statements on the summary of the 1993 discussions (A/48/29) and the replies received from States concerning the implementation of the Declaration (A/49/203 and Add.1). He welcomed the return of various States which had withdrawn from the Committee and re-emphasized the need for all permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean to join the Committee in its efforts to identify new means of attaining the objectives of the 1971 Declaration.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMEN

3. The CHAIRMAN said that it was necessary to elect a Vice-Chairman to fill the vacancy created by the departure of Mr. Matthew Neuhaus (Australia). He had been informed by the Permanent Mission of Australia that Mr. John Griffin was a candidate for that post. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Ad Hoc Committee wished to elect Mr. Griffin by acclamation.

4. It was so decided.

5. The CHAIRMAN said that, since the Group of Eastern European States had not yet proposed any candidate for the post of Vice-Chairman, consultations thereon would continue.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (A/AC.159/L.120)

6. The agenda was adopted.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

7. The CHAIRMAN, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/202 B, of 22 December 1992, and further to information from the Committee on Conferences regarding the utilization and cost of various conference services provided by the Secretariat, requested delegations to be punctual and to plan their statements in such a manner as to ensure that the conference services made available to the Committee were utilized effectively.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 48/82 OF 16 DECEMBER 1993

GENERAL DISCUSSION

FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF NEW ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

FUTURE ROLE OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE

8. Mr. ROWE (Australia) said that positive developments in the international and regional situation, with the end of the cold war and the historic transition in South Africa, had produced a quickening of interest in the concept of an Indian Ocean community and that the Ad Hoc Committee should seize the opportunity to demonstrate its relevance in that new situation. To that end it was vital for the Committee to end its past disagreements and take a more productive approach. It was instructive in that regard to look at successful examples of regional cooperation in other regions, taking note of the fact that they had taken root, almost without exception, in modest initiatives designed to foster habits of dialogue and cooperation and a sense of belonging to a single community and of sharing a community of interests, which had prepared the way for the establishment of more ambitious structures. His delegation was of the view that the Committee had set itself an overly ambitious agenda, on which, in the absence of cooperative regional institutions, it had not been possible to reach agreement. Without forsaking those larger issues or compromising on national positions, the member States of the Committee should consider establishing the mechanisms and arrangements currently being considered or implemented in a range of forums world wide that could be applicable to the Indian Ocean region. Australia proposed the convening by the United Nations in 1995 of a meeting of a group of experts on the Indian Ocean to build on the work of the Ad Hoc Committee and consider concrete new measures, such as those already proposed to promote peace and security in the region. The meeting could be followed by a regional seminar bringing together participants, meeting in their personal capacities, to discuss options for regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean. By means of such measures, which would in no way derogate from its mandate, the Ad Hoc Committee could demonstrate its ability to discharge the mandate which the General Assembly had conferred upon it for the second year in succession.

9. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan), recalling the origins of the Indian Ocean zone of peace concept, said that the 1971 Declaration, which had sought to bring about greater security in the region, had addressed some of the factors that had

(Mr. Khan, Pakistan)

appeared at the time to be the major causes of insecurity, specifically the expansion of military alliances and the projection of great Power rivalry. The Meeting of the Littoral and Hinterland States in 1979 had also stressed the need to institute regional measures. Subsequently, with the changes in the international situation, a more holistic approach had been taken in defining threats to the security and stability of the region, in particular threats emanating from within the area. A constant theme in those exercises had been the establishment of a regime which would lead to conditions of greater security and stability for the countries of the Indian Ocean region.

10. To make further progress, two things needed to be done: to deliberate on the content of the Indian Ocean zone of peace concept and to establish a process whereby concrete measures could be taken. In conceptual terms a zone of peace must be based on the following four elements: a commitment by States to the settlement of disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with the principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and the decisions of the international community; strict observance of the principle of sovereign equality, in which connection the States of the region must renounce policies of domination and hegemonism; the establishment of regional security arrangements (conventional arms control, maintenance of reasonable ratios between the naval and military forces of the littoral and hinterland States, and the establishment of local dispute-settlement mechanisms); and, lastly, the denuclearization of the region through non-proliferation commitments and obligations by nuclear-weapon States to respect the nuclear-free status of the area.

11. With regard to the process of establishing the zone of peace, Pakistan proposed the immediate convening of a second meeting of the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean, given the success of the first meeting. Those States were best placed to deliberate on concrete measures that would lead to the establishment of a viable zone of peace. His delegation was open to all ideas which other members of the Ad Hoc Committee might put forward on ways to implement the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace.

12. Mr. SHKOURKO (Russian Federation) said that the work of the Ad Hoc Committee should be carried out on a new basis, which implied the adoption of a realistic approach towards the establishment of a zone of peace and cooperation in the Indian Ocean, taking into account the current situation and the balance to be struck between the interests of regional and extraregional States. It was also important for the Ad Hoc Committee to make a contribution to resolving the military and non-military aspects of strengthening the security of the States of the region. The Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, the principal aim of which was to strengthen regional peace and security on the basis of regional efforts supported by the major world Powers and the maritime users of the Indian Ocean, was still highly relevant.

13. The elements of a new mandate for the Ad Hoc Committee authorizing a combination of regional and extraregional efforts could include: the conclusion between the States concerned, at a regional level, of a system of treaties on the non-use of force, respect for territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders, non-interference in internal affairs and the peaceful settlement of disputes; a review of measures to control the arms race in the region, and in particular the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, ballistic

(Mr. Shkourko, Russian Federation)

missiles and the more destructive conventional weapons; a reduction in the strength of the armed forces of the countries of the region to a level which would be sufficient to ensure their defence (those countries could agree on a system for monitoring compliance with such measures); an undertaking by extraregional Powers to respect the status of the zone and to consider reducing their own military presence in the region; and a guarantee of the zone by the permanent members of the Security Council. In addition to military measures consideration could be given to cooperation in the economic and social, scientific and technical and ecological fields.

14. The Russian Federation was, of course, willing to consider carefully any proposals that other delegations might make. The work of the Ad Hoc Committee should lead to the formulation of a draft resolution endowing the Committee with a new mandate, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session. The creation of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean was, of course, unthinkable without the participation of the major Powers, some of which, regrettably, were absent from the Committee's deliberations. It was to be hoped that the Committee's efforts to make progress would encourage that group of States to resume their participation in the work of the Committee.

15. Mr. LI Zhaoxing (China) outlined China's views on new alternative approaches to the Indian Ocean question, which had been submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 48/82.

16. As to the decision to establish the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, China had consistently supported the efforts of the States of the region to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to promote regional peace, security and stability. China hoped that that goal could be achieved at an early date since it would contribute to peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean and the world.

17. Establishing the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace would require improved cooperation from States, both within and outside the region. Major Powers outside the Indian Ocean must remove their military presence and refrain from using any means to carry out their threats, interference and aggression against the States of the region. The latter must develop their mutual relations on the basis of five principles: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each others internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence. The States of the region should not seek armament beyond their reasonable defence needs, and they should adopt practical measures to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

18. Recent changes in the international situation had created favourable conditions for establishing the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. China had supported resolution 48/82, in which the General Assembly requested the Ad Hoc Committee "to continue consideration of new alternative approaches building upon its deliberations at the session held in 1993, with a view to reaching early agreement to give new impetus to the process of strengthening cooperation and ensuring peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region." China would consider any reasonable, feasible new alternative approaches which might be

(Mr. Li Zhaoxing, China)

proposed on the basis of extensive consultations and which were conducive to the establishment of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace.

19. Mr. JUSUF (Indonesia) said that the situation was particularly favourable for considering new approaches in accordance with resolution 48/82, given the changes taking place globally and in the Indian Ocean region, and the positive developments in the field of arms limitation and disarmament.

20. He suggested organizing informal workshops, which would bring together a wide range of participants, such as Government officials, academics and observers. The results of such workshops would be useful inputs for the formulation of policies on the Indian Ocean. Such workshops could be the precursor of more formal, intergovernmental meetings, and could contribute to regional stability by creating an atmosphere conducive to productive consultations. The achievement of a new security equilibrium in the post-cold-war era depended on the capacity of the States of the region to manage potential conflicts and seek cooperative arrangements.

21. The second area worthy of consideration was that of naval armaments. While some naval armaments, including tactical nuclear weapons and short-range weapons on warships, had already been eliminated or reduced, there was a need to initiate negotiations on those categories of weapons which had not yet been dealt with, especially long-range nuclear missiles carried on submarines and other nuclear weapons. Considering the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean, it was essential to establish certain principles and guidelines for naval arms limitation and disarmament. A multilateral agreement on the prevention of incidents could be negotiated, and the possibility of modernizing the laws of sea warfare could be looked into. Another important objective should remain the investigation of possible ways in which naval organization, capabilities and experience could contribute to more effective ocean management policies for the peaceful uses of the Indian Ocean.

22. He emphasized the positive effects that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea would have on future maritime activities and naval operations. The fact that many States in the region shared maritime boundaries called for naval confidence-building measures among various subregions. Sharply reduced naval activities would have a stabilizing effect; the reduction or freezing of naval forces, security guarantees for sea lanes, prior notification of naval exercises and limitations on their scale, duration and geographical scope, and exchanges of information on naval matters were also desirable.

23. He proposed the convening of an international conference on the Indian Ocean. Its successful outcome would depend on the participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and other major maritime users of the Indian Ocean in the deliberations of the Ad Hoc Committee, and on their commitment to the goal of creating a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean.

24. Mr. RODRIGO (Sri Lanka) said that the Ad Hoc Committee must develop and benefit from the mood of cooperation which was increasingly taking the place of great-Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean. The Ad Hoc Committee was the appropriate forum to examine, in a constructive and, where necessary, critical manner, the concerns of the interested States. In accordance with General

(Mr. Rodrigo, Sri Lanka)

Assembly resolution 48/82, the Committee should continue consideration of those varied approaches, building on its discussions of the previous year. The Committee would benefit if all the permanent members of the Security Council once again became actively involved in its work. The Sri Lankan delegation, and the other non-aligned States, would welcome the return of France, the United Kingdom and the United States. He suggested that the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, should formally approach the Governments of the permanent members to ascertain their views on the subject.

25. The main thrust of the Committee's work during the current year should be to identify and focus on those issues which could yield positive results. It was of crucial importance to know whether to take a broad view on the Indian Ocean, including consideration of economic and other issues, or focus exclusively on military issues and confidence-building measures of a security nature. Certain political problems which had tended to inhibit the development of conditions of peace and security in the region had, in the past year, taken positive directions: the most far-reaching had been the end of apartheid and the establishment of a democratic Government in South Africa. Recent developments in the Middle East would also be conducive to greater security in the Indian Ocean.

26. In resolution 48/82, the General Assembly had expressly reaffirmed the importance of the freedom of navigation in the high seas, including in the Indian Ocean, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The fact that the United States and other industrialized States would soon accede to the Convention was a positive development of relevance to various aspects of the question of the Indian Ocean.

27. The Ad Hoc Committee should also give some thought to the nature and content of the report it would be submitting to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session. His delegation would favour an accurate report reflecting views expressed in the Committee as well as any priorities which might arise during discussions. A focus on those aspects on which there was broad agreement and prospects for further development would be extremely useful.

28. It would also be necessary to consider the resolution to be submitted to the General Assembly. It would be ideal to reach agreement before the beginning of the forty-ninth session, but that might not be easy. The substantive issues were too complex to be settled and to be reflected in a resolution which could command consensus support. The Committee should build slowly on understandings reached, and more time might be required for that. The elements to be included in a resolution could be discussed, if not finalized, in informal meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.